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ABSTRACT

This newsletter theme issue for academically talented youth discusses planning for college. The issue emphasizes that it is never too early to start thinking about college. An admissions officer from Johns Hopkins University talks frankly about factors that influence the decision to admit or deny a student. Academically talented students discuss how well their needs are met by undergraduate programs on four different types of college campuses: (1) private universities in urban settings, (2) private liberal arts colleges in rural settings, (3) large public universities, and (4) technical institutes. Options for covering escalating college costs are outlined. A review of Washington University (St. Louis, Missouri) is provided, based on perceptions of six students enrolled there. An article describes how to write for publication, and another chronicles the story of a young author whose contest-winning book underwent extensive editing before publication. A creative expression page concludes the newsletter issue, with a book review and puzzle. (JDD)

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VOLUME I, NUMBER 2

ImaGiNe...

Opportunities and Resources for Academically Talented Youth

ED 375 537

Spotlight On

PLANNING AHEAD FOR COLLEGE

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Arlene W. Sullivan
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

November/December 1993

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Throughout this issue, one point is repeated: *It's never too early to start thinking about college.* It's never too soon to consider what kind of campus environment appeals to you, to choose the paths that will make your application stand out from the rest, to prepare to pay for college.

In fact, planning ahead for college is essential to ensure that the decisions you make will truly be right for you.

To help answer some of the questions most commonly asked by prospective college students, we went directly to the experts. On the following pages, an admissions officer talks frankly about factors that influence the decision to admit or deny a student. Academically talented students discuss how well their needs are met by undergraduate programs on four different types of college campuses. A recent graduate points out that the quality of your college education depends more on the effort you contribute than on the prestige of the school you attend. And a financial aid officer reviews your options for covering escalating college costs.

Be sure to gather information from many other sources, too. Talk with your guidance counselor and teachers, read the catalogues and brochures that will fill your mailbox, question college students and alumni. Most importantly, think about who you are and what will suit you best. ■

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MAILBAG

Q: *I will be finishing all the math courses my high school offers before I'm ready to graduate. What do I do then?*

A: This problem is not unusual. The ideal educational program allows students to move at a pace appropriate to their abilities in each subject area. A student who is highly talented in mathematics is likely to move more quickly through those courses and may further accelerate by taking math in academic summer programs. Such a student may run out of math courses before high school graduation. What's next?

Some students choose to enter college early. Making this decision requires evaluating many factors, including the student's social and emotional maturity and the student's readiness to move into college-level coursework in all subjects, not just in the primary area of strength.

More commonly, students prefer to remain with their age peers. If you want to stay in high school, several options are available:

Consider transferring to a high school with a greater variety of advanced mathematics courses. Investigate magnet schools, state residential high schools, and other public or private high schools that have a fairly high concentration of accelerated students and are therefore likely to offer more advanced mathematics courses.

Enroll part-time in courses at a local college. Of course, being able to exercise this option depends upon having a college in your community and being able to arrange scheduling and transportation. Be sure to evaluate the quality of the courses offered; if the quality is low, you may be forced to repeat the material if you later enroll in a highly selective university. Also, when you are ready to consider a full-time college, investigate policies for credit and placement regarding those courses you took at other colleges when you were in high school. Such policies vary considerably from campus to campus.

Find a mentor who will tutor you individually. In addition to providing advanced math instruction, a mentor can serve as an excellent role model. However, it's unlikely that you will be able to get college credit for your independent study.

Take a correspondence course. A variety of highly respected universities offer college courses by correspondence. You must be highly motivated to work independently on courses by mail, but such a program will provide a structured curriculum and the stronger possibility of getting credit later. Again, credit policies vary depending on the institution.

If other students are also in need of advanced courses, try persuading your school to offer an additional math course or two. Take your proposal to the school administration with a positive attitude; be prepared to discuss their concerns and objections. Cite evidence (if you can back it up) that a reasonable number of students might enroll in the proposed course, drawing from several grades or even several schools. If no one in the school is qualified to teach such a course, offer to find a college professor or another member of the community who would be interested.

If necessary, omit formal math instruction for one year, while pursuing related activities to keep your math skills sharp. We would not recommend that you do this for any period longer than a year. You could take a summer math course, participate in math competitions, do math puzzles and problems on your own, and/or take a science course (such as physics or chemistry) that includes some mathematical applications.

The problem of exhausting the available mathematics curriculum too early has no one solution. Each student's interest and motivation, as well as the available community resources, must be considered before identifying an appropriate course of action. Students who are accelerating rapidly through mathematics in the younger grades are encouraged to plan ahead as much as possible, investigating options and talking to school officials about alternatives before the time comes to make a decision. ■

Extremely mathematically talented students, most of whom were highly accelerated in mathematics, were the subjects of a 1990-91 study that evaluated post-calculus options for high schoolers. See "Mathematics Acceleration of Highly Talented Students: An Evaluation," by E.R. Kolitch and L.E. Brody, The Gifted Child Quarterly, 36(2), Spring 1992, pp. 78-86.

STUDENTS & PARENTS:

Do you have a question about educational placement, subject/grade acceleration, or other concerns relevant to academically talented students? If so, please write to *Imagine*, SET at CTY, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218-9985. Some questions may be answered in the Mailbag column; others may become the subject of an article.

SENIORS:

Remember that your entry for the 53rd Westinghouse Science Talent Search must be received before midnight, Wednesday, *December 1, 1993*, by Science Service, 1719 N Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036. See the information in *Imagine*'s September/October issue (p. 6), or call Science Service at (202) 785-2255.

Imagine...
Opportunities and Resources for Academically Talented Youth

Volume 1 • Number 2
November/December 1993

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SET Director • Linda E. Brody, Ed.D.
Research Associate • Carol C. Blackburn, Ph.D.
Staff Writer/Editor • Susan B. Hellerman
Contributing Writer • Amanda J. Claybaugh
Administrative Assistant • Patricia A. Wade
Designer, JHU Press • Lesli M. Li

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2715 North Charles Street
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Phone: (410) 516-6945 • FAX: (410) 516-6968
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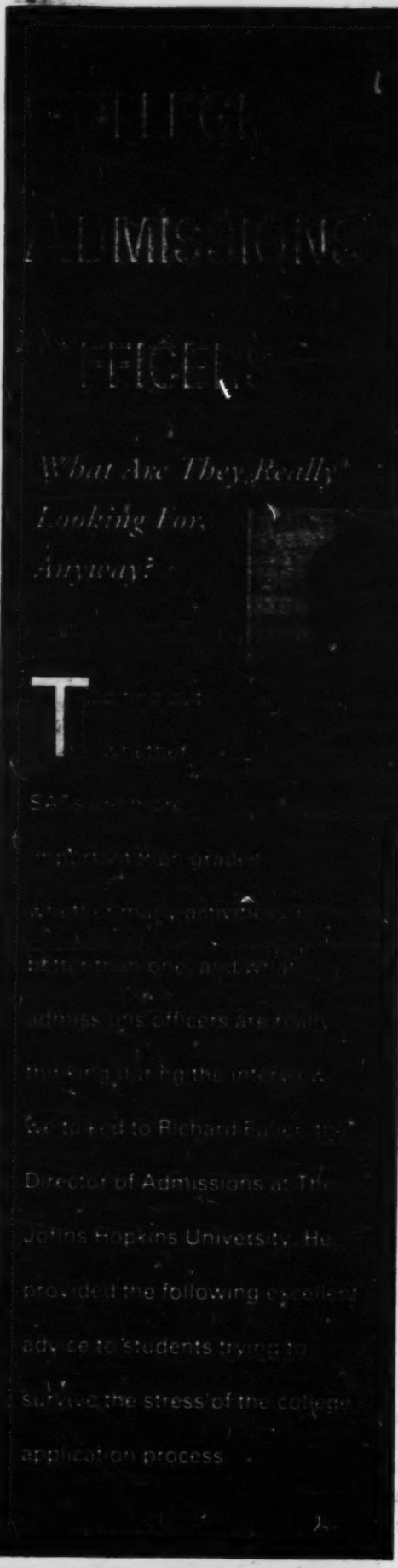
Address editorial correspondence to:
Susan B. Hellerman
SET at CTY
The Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, Maryland 21218-9985
Phone: (410) 516-0309 • FAX: (410) 516-0804



Beginning Early

Imagine: *When should students start thinking about college?*

Fuller: It's never too early to start looking. As high school juniors and seniors, students will be bombarded with questions from their families, teachers, and friends: "Do you want to go to a small school or a big one? A campus that's rural or urban?" Unless they've done their research, students will end up giving random answers, just to get people off their backs. They can't know how a mid-sized campus feels until they've visited several.

Begin by visiting colleges in your area, even if you know you want to enroll farther from home. When you're on vacation, take a look at colleges nearby. Every campus that you visit will add to your sense of how colleges differ and can help you choose the college that feels right to you.

Imagine: *Should students begin preparing for college as early as middle school?*

Fuller: Students need to understand that the decisions they make in middle school place them on a particular academic track. You should choose your classes carefully, with advice from your parents and guidance counselors, because these choices will determine what you can do later on.

Similarly, becoming involved in an extracurricular activity when you're younger allows you to pursue it more vigorously throughout high school. Showing depth of involvement in one or more activities is better than dabbling in many.

The High School Record

Imagine: *How important are a student's high school grades?*

Fuller: The transcript is the single most important factor in an admissions decision.

Imagine: *What about courses? Many students wonder whether they're better off taking honors courses and risking some* Bs *or taking easier courses and getting straight* As.

Fuller: We look at your transcript as well as your GPA, and we know whether your school gives more weight to honors courses or whether it counts all grades in the same way. So you should take the most challenging course load you can handle. Your schedule can make room for a range of interests; it's fine to take some art classes or home ec. But you still need all the core courses (math, science, history, English, and a foreign language), and those courses need to be challenging. But "challenging" doesn't necessarily mean that you have to take honors courses in every subject.

Imagine: *But it's better if you do?*

Fuller: If you can take all honors classes and do well, that's great—as long as you can still have a life. Some students push themselves too hard, trying to impress us; yet we want students who do more than study all the time. What is important is that you take the hardest courses available in the fields you plan to study in college. A future pre-med needs to take the most advanced biology course, for example.

Imagine: *What if a school doesn't offer AP Biology, or any honors courses at all? If their high schools aren't academically as demanding as others, students are anxious about being judged against those who may be better prepared.*

Fuller: First of all, the admissions officer who is reading your application knows a lot about the school you're coming from. At selective schools, there is usually an officer in charge of each region of the country, and this officer attempts to become familiar with all the schools in that region. Also, your school will send a high school profile along with your transcript, telling us what courses are offered, the range of SAT scores, and where graduates end up going to college. So we're able to tell how well you've done in relation to your classmates, and that's how we'll judge you.

Many students feel they're at some kind of disadvantage; they think they don't have a chance either because their school is too easy, or because their school is too hard. The best advice I can give is a cliché: you have to play the cards that are dealt you. Do as well as you can at whatever school you're attending.

The SATs

Imagine: *How important are SAT scores?*

Fuller: It varies by school, but they are important; admissions officers do students a disservice when they deny the importance of standardized tests. A highly selective school receives applications from all over the country, from all over the world. A standarized test is the only element that levels the field, that remains a constant through all those applications.

Imagine: *How should a student prepare for SATs?*

Fuller: I am not a big proponent of SAT prep courses. I believe students who spend as many hours reading as they would taking a prep course will see equally positive results.

Most high schools provide some SAT instruction, and that should be enough. Taking a practice test to familiarize yourself with the

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test's format is worthwhile.

IMAGINE: *What should students do if their SAT scores are low?*

FULLER: Try taking the test again, after becoming more comfortable with its format. Test anxiety is a real problem for some students.

If your scores remain fairly low, then it's up to you to present stronger sides of yourself. Visit the colleges that interest you, schedule interviews with admissions officers and alumni, have your teachers and guidance counselor write letters explaining that, even though you don't test very well, you'd still be a great addition to the university.

Also, there's some truth to the claims that the SATs are biased in terms of gender and race. So we're sensitive to that.

Extracurricular Activities

IMAGINE: *What about extracurricular activities?*

FULLER: It's a common fallacy that we're looking only for well-rounded students; what we're looking for is a well-rounded class. We're more interested in a student who concentrates on a specific activity than in one who gives a little bit of time to a whole list of clubs. For example, someone may study the violin, play in several orchestras, and win awards. We want to see evidence that a student will make a significant contribution to life on campus.

IMAGINE: *What do you think when you see an incredibly long list of activities? How can you tell if students are padding their applications?*

FULLER: There's a fine line between a list that looks impressive and a list that looks made up. It's important that you be completely candid on your application, because the truth almost always comes out. Your guidance counselor may tell us what activities you supported, or one of your letters of recommendation may list the things you really did.

Still, activities can't be verified in the same way that grades and SAT scores can, so we can't give them quite as much weight.

IMAGINE: *What about students who can't participate in many activities because they work?*

FULLER: We understand that working is a financial necessity for some students. If you're working to support yourself or your family, that's commendable. If you're just working to make a little extra money, and are doing it at the expense of extracurricular involvement, you may be hurting yourself in the admissions process.

The Essay

IMAGINE: *What do you look for in an application essay?*

FULLER: We read the essay to get a sense of you as a person; the essay is also your opportunity to show your creative side, as well as your writing skills.

We're always on the lookout for mistakes: misspellings or grammatical errors; an essay that explains why the student desperately wants to attend "Johnson Hopkins" or "Jack Hopkins"; an application, enclosed by accident, to the wrong school! We post the funniest mistakes on our bulletin board, but almost any mistake puts the applicant in jeopardy of being denied.

IMAGINE: *Is it possible to be too creative with the essay? I've heard of a student who, instead of writing the essay, baked a loaf of bread.*

FULLER: Use common sense. It's popular to send videotapes along with your application, the idea being that submitting a videotape or portfolio guarantees acceptance. Well, admissions officers read applications eight hours a day for months; they take them home at night and on weekends. Most of us don't have the time to analyze videos, portfolios, etc. There are better ways for a student to stand out.

The Interview

IMAGINE: *The idea of the interview makes a lot of students really anxious.*

FULLER: It shouldn't, largely because admissions officers are generally "people who like people." Think of the interview as a conversation, an exchange of ideas between the interviewer and the student. We're not trying to intimidate you or put you on the defensive; we're not going to ask you some strange question out of the blue. You'll never be asked, "If you could be any household appliance, which household appliance would you be?"

IMAGINE: *What if the worst happens? What if a student goes blank and can't think of anything to say?*

FULLER: If that's so, admit it. Just say, "This is only my first (or second) interview, so I'm still a little nervous . . ." or "I've always wanted to go to this school, but now that I'm here, I feel really nervous." Admitting your anxiety often eases it, or at least makes the admissions officer feel more sympathetic.

Also, interviewing at a school that doesn't particularly interest you can be good practice. You'll get a better sense of the kinds of questions that are asked, and you'll learn what it feels like to sit in the waiting room, looking over the literature, waiting to be called in.

IMAGINE: *What about interviews with alumni?*

FULLER: Alumni interviews can be very helpful. If you live in California and are applying to a school on the East Coast, then the alumni who interview you become your link to the school. By making a good impression, you can enlist them as advocates who may intervene with the admissions officers on your behalf. Even if you've already talked with an admissions officer, an alumni interview can still help.

Admissions and Financial Aid

IMAGINE: *With a declining number of schools able to guarantee need-blind admissions, some students wonder whether applying for financial aid will hurt their chances of being admitted.*

FULLER: That's a much smaller problem than people think. The admissions process was never completely need-blind: a school might not offer aid to transfer students or to those admitted from its waiting list. Now it's becoming more difficult for colleges to give full aid to all their students—and that's very unfortunate—but it still only affects a few students at the very margins of the class.

IMAGINE: *So it's still safe to apply for financial aid?*

FULLER: Absolutely. If you don't apply for aid, you'll never know what might have been offered.

Financial considerations should never be the most important factor when you're deciding where to apply. You should apply to the schools you think will give you the best education, where you think you'll be happiest. But you can make sure those schools represent a wide range of cost options, and obviously cost will be a factor in your final choice after acceptance.

IMAGINE: *I've heard that applying Early Decision can be a good idea for students who need financial aid, because the college still has a lot of money to award early in the year. But what about students who are admitted under an Early Decision contract and then don't receive the amount of aid that their families require? Do they have to attend?*

FULLER: The contract is meant to be binding, so students should be sure they understand all the conditions of the Early Decision contract before signing. (Early Action programs are generally not binding.) For a rough estimate of the amount of aid they are eligible for/likely to receive, students should provide information about their family income and assets to the college's financial aid office and enter into a dialogue with them. Most aid offices will do this.

Early Entrance

IMAGINE: *Some academically talented students have exhausted the courses their high school has to offer and are ready for college entrance by ninth or tenth grade. How does the admissions office evaluate their applications?*

FULLER: When accelerated students apply, we

evaluate whether they are ready to live on an urban campus among people who are several years older than they are. We interview parents and guidance counselors as well, to determine whether the students are socially and emotionally ready to join the Hopkins community. We want all students we admit to be able to benefit from, and to make a contribution to, life on campus.

IMAGINE: *And do accelerated students tend to fit into the Hopkins community?*

FULLER: We find nearly all those we accept to be as mature as typical college freshmen, if not more mature. Most of the students we've admitted a few years early have made very important contributions to Hopkins, and we're very glad to have had them here.

Reflections on the Admissions Process

IMAGINE: *What are you looking for when you pick a new freshman class?*

FULLER: We're trying to create a community of different people. First, we admit only those we think can do the work, who belong here academically. But after that, we choose some athletes, some actors, and some artists; some who want to study humanities and some who want to study the sciences. And we select people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds.

At Hopkins, we're proud of our diversity. If you walk around our campus, you'll see that everyone looks different from everyone else. That makes life here a more genuine learning environment.

IMAGINE: *Do you ever make mistakes?*

FULLER: College admissions is still an art, not a science. Decisions are very easy for us to make at the top 15% and the bottom 15% of the applicant pool, and very difficult to make for the middle 70%. So every year we may admit some people we should have denied, and deny some people we should have admitted. We work hard to minimize these, however.

Final Advice

IMAGINE: *Any last words of wisdom?*

FULLER: Choosing a college is like viewing a painting: you need to look at it from many different perspectives. If you visit on a day when it's raining, or a day when you're in a bad mood, or even if your family has trouble finding a parking space, you may end up hating the school. So it's important to consider many different perspectives to give your decision balance.

Choosing a college is a major life event, one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. Not as important as birth or marriage or death, but still something you'll remember for the rest of your life. Many older adults can tell you the colleges they applied to, whether or not they were accepted, and why they chose the one they did. I could still tell you my SAT scores—although they might have gone up in my memory a little over the years.

Whenever I speak to groups of students, I give them one last piece of advice: Enjoy your senior year. The college search can be stressful, but you still need to appreciate life. And I'd like to give that same advice to families as well, because once children go off to college, the relationship with parents really changes. Not that it's necessarily worse, but it will definitely never be the same. So, parents and children should really try to enjoy that last year together. ■

When Videotapes Don't Work Anymore . . .

Three Good Ways to Stand Out

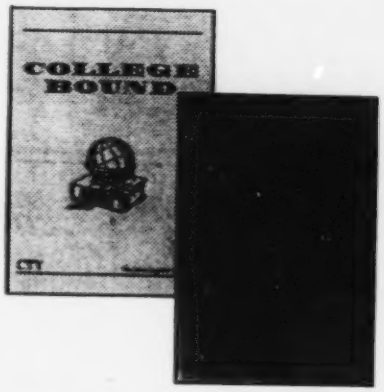
- **Earn good grades:** "This may sound like the advice your grandfather would give you," Fuller says "but a really strong record is the best way to stand out."
- **Prepare for the interview:** Know a lot about the colleges to which you're applying, and ask thoughtful questions. If you seem excited by their school, they'll be excited by you.
- **Write thank-you letters:** Impress them with your manners as you remind them of your interest.

Besides Misspelling the School's Name . . .

Four Ways to Annoy an Admissions Officer

- **Suddenly join lots of activities in your junior year:** "We can see right through that," Fuller warns.
- **Submit an essay you've obviously written for a class at school:** Colleges like to think they're worth the time it takes to write a new essay.
- **Send too many recommendations:** "The quality of the applicant," Fuller says, "tends to be inversely proportional to the number of recommendations."
- **Appear uninterested in or bored by the interview:** If you seem apathetic about them, they will feel apathetic about you.

New Publications from Talent Searches



College Bound answers questions encountered during the search for college and career. Special features include selected scholarships, guidelines for writing a college essay, and a section on College Board publications. (109 pp.; $10.00)

To order, write to: CTY Publications & Resources, The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218-9985; or call (410) 516-0245.

A 40-page college counseling guide, developed by the Center for Talent Development at Northwestern University, is due to be published later this year by the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented.

To order, write to: NRC/GT at the University of Connecticut, 362 Fairfield Road, U-7, Storrs, CT 06269-2007; or call (303) 486-4826.

What's a Parent to Do? Ideas & Options for Parents of Bright Teens, from Duke University's Talent Identification Program (TIP), advises parents on "how to raise a bright, happy, responsible, and generally wonderful teenager." Chapter 8 discusses "What to Do about Getting into College." (158 pp.; $14.95)

To order, write to: TIP Parent's Guide, c/o Scholar Communications, Inc., 4905 Pine Cone Drive, Suite 1, Durham, NC 27707-9877.

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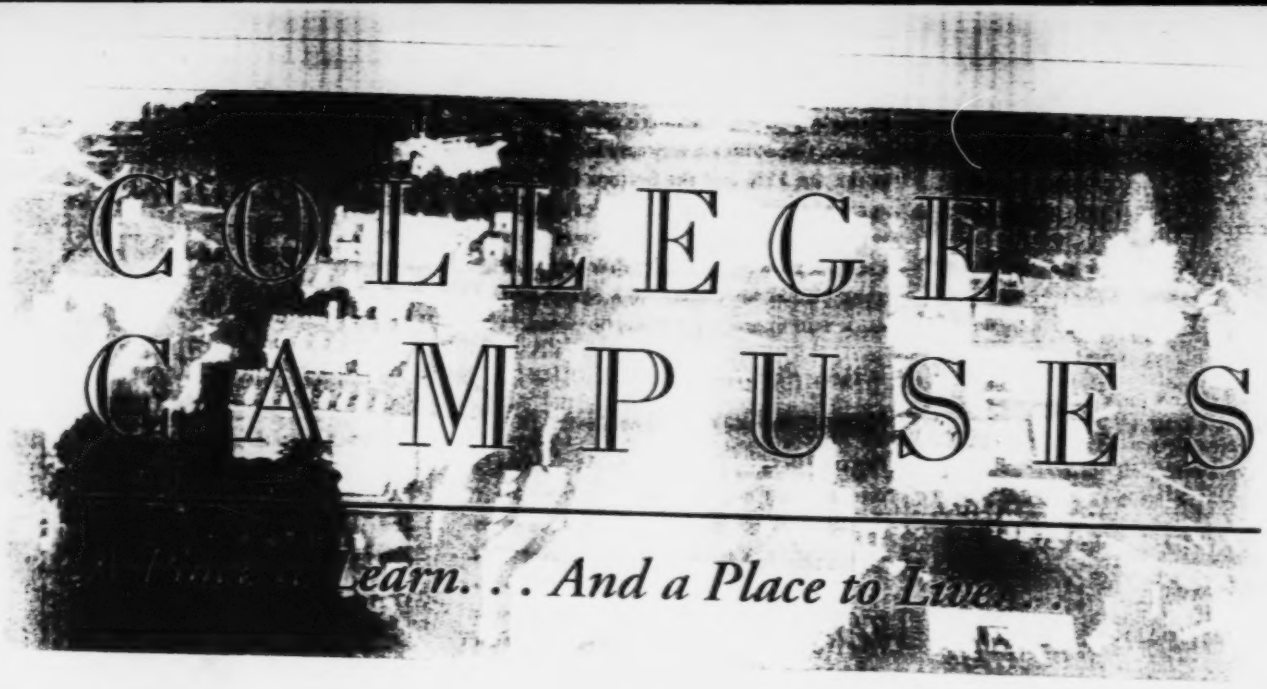

COLLEGE CAMPUSES

...earn. . . And a Place to Live. . .

Major decisions are never easy, and choosing a college is certainly a major decision in any student's life. The key to making a decision you won't regret is to give the process the careful consideration it deserves. Begin by asking some pertinent questions: When you picture yourself at college, what sort of environment do you have in mind? What surroundings would enable you to live and work most comfortably?

To help you begin your decision-making process, we profile here four types of undergraduate environments: private universities in urban settings, private colleges in rural settings, public universities, and technical institutes.

Quotes below are taken from surveys of academically talented undergraduates and alumni at the most selective colleges and universities, where students share a high level of achievement and a deep commitment to learning. Do not accept these respondents' comments as definitive; rather, note those aspects of each school that they single out for praise or criticism, and decide how important each of these factors would be for you.

At these top colleges and universities, many students find the outstanding intelligence of their peers both exhilarating and humbling: "Most of all, the students are fantastic: the most brilliant and exciting group I'll probably ever meet (at least in such numbers). Enjoy them rather than being daunted," one student urges. But another, admitting that being one talented student among many is sometimes hard, advises that the best candidate for such an environment would be "someone with academic confidence but not arrogance—arrogance is shattered rather quickly—and someone who knows how to deal with both successes and failures."

Private Universities in Urban Settings

Respondents from Columbia, Harvard, University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale

These universities are large enough to provide students with an exciting array of classes and activities. As one Harvard student noted, "There are thousands (yes, thousands!) of course offerings." For some students, however, the sheer number of choices can be burdensome rather than liberating: "It's very easy to slip through the cracks or let opportunities pass by without even finding out about them because the school is so large and disorganized (like the real world, but richer and smarter)."

These students argue that large private universities are best for "those who can fend for themselves and wish to work with top scholars." In fact, that desire is what brings many students to such schools: they want to be taught by the finest minds in the academic world. "The academic resources are formidable," one student writes. "Professors are not only leaders in their fields but are often *creating* their fields."

Professors who are busy defining their fields, however, may not have much time to devote to teaching. Admitting that he may have had unrealistic expectations about the education he would receive at Harvard, one student finds himself "somewhat disappointed by the teaching of senior faculty, many of whom seem too caught up in their research to pay attention to undergraduates." Yet, as another noted, it may be "neither necessary nor considerate to demand that a Nobel laureate answer your questions on, say, elementary quantum mechanics." This student finds professors to be "accessible if you make the necessary effort" and the TAs (teaching assistants) to be "generally excellent."

Undergraduates at most large universities represent a cross section of cultural backgrounds. One Yale student appreciated "the opportunity to interact with a wide range of people, from a scion of the Rockefellers to immigrants from Viet Nam." For many, this diversity is a valuable part of the education they receive. "I think that Columbia's ethnic diversity is one of its greatest strengths; core courses often give rise to lively and provocative discussions on race relations, historiography, and foreign policy."

For some, living on an urban campus is a very positive part of their college experience. "Chicago is a great city," one student writes; while another notes that "for a motivated, independent, and adventurous young student, New York is an incredible place to be." However, the draw of an exciting city may overshadow campus life, since "most people go into the city rather than stay on campus."

Others feel more ambivalent: "The worst things about being a student at Penn were related to its location—the danger, the panhandlers, and the racial tension all around the campus." Another response is even more blunt: "New Haven stinks. It has all the disadvantages of a big city without any of the advantages." However, another Yale student "found Yale's location in the troubled city to be a crucial part of my educational experience. New Haven prevents Yale from being an isolated enclave of academia and provides

many opportunities for involvement in politics and social action."

Private Liberal Arts Colleges in Rural Settings

Respondents from Amherst, Dartmouth, and Middlebury

Unlike research-oriented large universities, small liberal arts colleges allow professors to devote more of their energies to teaching undergraduates. Most classes are small, and nearly all are taught by professors, rather than graduate assistants. "Amherst serves *only* undergraduates. Only professors teach classes, and it is hard to find a class over 100 (with the average size being 30)."

Smaller class size allows students to have more contact with professors outside the classroom as well. "I spend a good five hours a week in my advisor's office," one student says, "talking not only about my thesis but about any number of issues." Students who can spend this much time with their professors are likely to receive a great deal of academic guidance and emotional support.

Although a smaller student body enables greater involvement between students and professors, a smaller school also means fewer professors, thus fewer available courses. Nevertheless, many students find that course quality more than makes up for lack of variety: "Dartmouth is a small college without the vast array of courses offered by some of the largest universities, but the quality of what they do offer and of the professors who teach them is excellent."

A more limited curriculum poses problems for students who are already accelerated when they begin college, for they may run out of upper-level classes in their major before they graduate. Faculty members may be quite willing to sponsor independent studies for such students, but drawbacks include the lack of peer interaction and the possibility that the quality of instruction may not be as rigorous as that found in more structured classes.

A smaller enrollment also means less variety among students. Many respondents complain that all their classmates seem to come from the same background, although their schools are trying to become more diverse. "There is not a lot of ethnic diversity at Dartmouth or in the area, and I understand that it can be a hard place for minority students to feel at home," one student writes. "Middlebury is cursed with a 'white-bread' student body," another admits, "but I feel that this situation *is* improving—you may just have to work a little harder to find diversity."

Furthermore, one student argues, the environment of a smaller campus can make encounters with different kinds of people more comfortable: "The size and closeness allow for familiarity with your community, better understanding between people, and a chance to meet different people in a family-like setting."

Most students chose these colleges, at least in part, for their lovely and rather isolated settings which make it easy to pursue outdoor activities as vigorously as academics. Dartmouth students are, in the words of one respondent, "people who combine environmentalism and a love of sports with a desire for serious academic pursuit." "The Vermont wilderness is breathtaking," a Middlebury student says. "It's a gorgeous environment in which to live." And she points out that, while the school is forty minutes from the nearest city, "the surroundings of Middlebury are not isolating at all if you love hiking, camping, climbing, skiing."

By definition, rural colleges are isolated from the city—from both its good and bad aspects. "There are no cool nightclubs, no funky ethnic neighborhoods with restaurants, no Metropolitan Museum or Broadway, but there are also no traffic jams, no smog, no crowded apartments, and very little crime." The relative isolation of these colleges causes their students to focus inward, to center their attention and their energies on campus life.

Of course, not all small liberal arts colleges are in rural environments. Swarthmore, Haverford, and Wellesley (to name only three) are in the suburbs of major cities. Their undergraduates enjoy both a small campus and easy access to the culture and entertainment of a large city. A suburban campus, however, cannot provide the full range of outdoor activities available on or near a campus that abuts areas of wilderness.

Large Public Universities

Respondents from the University of California at Berkeley, University of Michigan, University of Washington, and University of Wisconsin

Such universities do not lack for diversity, either in course catalogues or among the student body. And they are both prestigious enough to attract outstanding students and large enough to offer outstanding resources. "Berkeley's education is first-rate. The professors are usually amazing lecturers, both for the instruction they give and for their prowess in their fields." At the University of Wisconsin, "a large variety of interesting courses in nationally-ranked departments is available." Because the University of Washington is so large, another student notes, it "has tremendous resources available to the undergraduate. Libraries and computer facilities, for example, are all topnotch."

Many first- and second-year students, while praising their outstanding professors, complain of difficulty meeting them. Large classes contribute to this problem. "At Berkeley, there is definitely a problem with student/professor relationships. The class sizes for lower-level classes are sometimes ridiculous, running up to seven or eight hundred students." Also contributing to the problem, as one student points out, is the fact that "undergraduate studies are *not* what made the University of Michigan the name it is today." When professors concentrate on teaching graduate students or doing research, undergraduate education may suffer. At Michigan, this student believes, teaching introductory classes "is not interesting to the profs in that field, so the classes are taught in a way designed simply to get everybody through."

Third- and fourth-year students, however, emphasize that professors are accessible to those who seek them out; and nearly all say that their upper-level courses are well-taught by faculty who are both knowledgeable and engaged. Discussing his own university, one respondent from Berkeley could have been speaking for students at all these schools: "To get the most out of a Berkeley education takes

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some effort but is well worth your time."

Yet, many students who are willing to make that required effort complain that they don't receive the guidance that would enable them to take full advantage of the opportunities offered. "At Berkeley, you must be very self-directed. Advising is often weak, so without a good sense of what you want, it would be easy to get lost in the sea of stuff here."

Often, the range of options available at a large public university can be as intimidating socially as it is academically. "It's very easy to feel lost in a university with 18,000 undergraduates," one student admits. "It can be difficult to find one's niche in a school as large as Michigan." But in a school that large, nearly all students will ultimately find the right niche. "Socially the University of Michigan is so diverse, anyone could easily find a place here. There is an outlet for every facet of yourself that you might wish to explore."

Because these universities are so large, they mirror the larger society and offer their students the full range of social, cultural, and academic opportunities. "Berkeley is a microcosm of the real world, one that forces students to face many realities," one student says, and many echo this description.

Large universities expect their undergraduates to assume a great deal of responsibility for their academic and social lives, and students find this expectation to be alternately maturing and daunting. Such schools, as one student describes them, force their students "to be aggressive, because even getting the classes you want requires a certain amount of determination." Yet learning to be more assertive and resolute, others point out, means acquiring the skills that life requires: "Berkeley's first message to a new student is, 'Welcome to the real world.' It's a blessing in disguise. I'm ready for anything now."

TECHNICAL INSTITUTES

Correspondents from Caltech and MIT

The best technical institutes offer a distinctive undergraduate experience—one that is more like graduate school in many ways. Although these schools do offer humanities courses, their overwhelming focus on science and technology primarily attracts students who know they want to specialize in science or engineering and who are ready to specialize as undergraduates.

Both physical and intellectual resources at these schools are topnotch; professors are working on the most current problems in their fields and have the most up-to-date equipment. One student praises MIT for the "cutting edge knowledge" it teaches and the "most current technology" it provides. Another refers to the exciting atmosphere, exclaiming, "MIT is where things *happen*; even we lowly undergraduates sense this." As one student notes, researchers who are deeply committed to their subject can be inspiring role models: "There are people at Caltech for whom research truly is the guiding passion of their lives."

As at other top research institutions, however, students sometimes find that their professors are busier making things happen than teaching undergraduates about those things: "Our professors are researchers more than teachers. From looking at our course evaluation guide, one would get the impression that the best-taught subjects at MIT are music and Japanese!" A student at Caltech echoed this complaint: "The general attitude I saw among the faculty at Caltech was that teaching was a burden to take on when necessary and to be avoided when possible. A depressing number of Caltech's faculty, while excellent scientists, are average teachers at best."

The intellectual intensity and focus of these schools can be exciting for students who share them. "At Caltech, everyone is science oriented," one student says. "There are many people around who share my views and interests." Others, however, consider it "something of a loss not to be able to get to know and learn from people studying other, dramatically different, majors."

The single-minded pursuit of science and engineering can deter students who are still questioning their commitment to those fields. "Someone who is sure about going into engineering will love MIT. If you are on the line trying to decide, MIT will probably turn you off engineering," one student advises. Another found Caltech "a very difficult place to be. 'Intense' barely begins to describe it. Professors, whether they have families or not, tend to work very long days and often weekends, and they expect their students to do the same. This is not necessarily a problem; individuals for whom research truly is the guiding passion of their lives thrive there."

CONCLUSION

The four types of schools we have profiled represent only a few alternatives among many. Although the private universities we've looked at are in urban settings and the small colleges in rural ones, you can also find a few small colleges that are in the middle of large cities and some universities that are located in fairly small towns.

Among those schools with specialized curricula, technical schools were the only ones we explored here. However, you may also want to consider art schools, music conservatories, or service academies.

Use these profiles to start thinking about the type of school you'd like to attend. Weigh the opinions of the college students we've quoted on what's been positive and negative about their college years. Consider how you might feel about those issues. Then begin planning ahead to make your own college experience as positive as it can possibly be. ■

How Can Anyone Afford That?

THE INS AND OUTS OF FINANCIAL AID

Ellen Frishberg, Director of Student Financial Services

The price of a college education is rising far faster than income or inflation. In the mid-1970s a year at the most expensive colleges cost about $4,000, a figure many families—with some belt tightening—paid out of pocket. Today, when a year at the most expensive colleges costs more than $25,000, few families can manage the same fiscal feat. And the spiral continues upward.

As more and more parents are discovering that they cannot readily afford the schools their children want to attend, more and more families are applying for financial aid. But if the admissions process intimidates students, the financial aid labyrinth alarms entire families.

To make financial aid procedures a little less daunting for readers of *Imagine*, we interviewed **Ellen Frishberg, Director of Student Financial Services for The Johns Hopkins University**. She reviewed aid options and offered some very good advice: As with other aspects of the college decision-making process, it's never too early to start thinking about financial aid.

"Parents should begin saving for college as soon as their child is born," warns Frishberg, who has already set up college funds for her own children (one of whom is only four months old). College has become so expensive, she says, that parents can no longer count on paying for it out of their annual income, nor can they rely on the colleges to pay it for them. So parents must plan ahead in new ways.

Even after saving all they can, many families still cannot cover the college bill. Such families may be eligible for *need-based aid*, which since the 1960s has attempted to close the gap between what a college costs and what a family can pay. Need-based aid is funded through several programs by the federal government and is also available directly from educational institutions themselves.

FEDERAL NEED-BASED AID

To ensure equitable results across the country, the federal government uses a standard formula—adjusted every year—to define a family's level of need. After analyzing income and assets to determine what a family can afford to pay, the government subtracts the family's assessment from a particular college's total cost: tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, personal expenses, and travel between home and school. The balance remaining may be covered through one or more of the following programs.

Work-Study Programs

Federal funds for work-study programs are made available to every college, based on the number of students it enrolls. So a college's financial aid officer often begins by giving campus jobs to qualifying students. Wages vary; work-study jobs may involve serving food in the cafeteria, clerking in an office, or helping a professor conduct research.

Some fear that holding a job is too much of a burden for college students. But studies have shown, Frishberg points out, that students who work adjust more quickly to college life, are better able to manage their time and money, and are more likely to stay in school. As long as students work no more than fifteen hours a week, she says, their grades should not suffer.

Student Loans

Students who need more money than a

FEDERAL AID APPLICATION FORMS

Eligibility for federal aid is determined by the "Free Application for Federal Student Aid" (FAFSA) form, on which families must report all their income and some of their assets. Many colleges also require additional information through the "Financial Aid Form" (FAF).

Although these forms are available in November and are due at the discretion of each school, Frishberg advises students to fill them out as soon as possible after January 1—and certainly no later than four weeks before the deadline set by each school. Because a family's tax forms will not have arrived by January, fairly accurate income estimates are acceptable.

After completing the FAFSA and the FAF, families send them to a *processing service*, which checks for accuracy and evaluates the information using the federal formula for need. Individual colleges then use the processing service reports to determine whether a student deserves federal aid. Colleges that have also established their own standards of need will also send out supplementary forms.

Forms can be confusing, and Frishberg urges families to contact a college's financial aid officer about anything they don't understand. They should also inform the financial aid office of any special circumstances that the forms do not cover. Students whose parents have lost their jobs, have become seriously ill, or are divorcing, for example, may be eligible for additional money.

Final Advice: Apply early, apply on time, and keep in touch with your financial aid officer throughout your college years.

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STUDENTS REVIEW

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

College Review Series

This on-going series is intended to aid prospective college students in their search by offering 'insiders' views of selected colleges and universities, as expressed by current undergraduates or recent graduates who have exceptionally high academic ability. These students share a general bias in judging undergraduate education: they all have high expectations for a college or university's academic standards, its institutional and instructional flexibility, and its respect for nurturance of emerging talent. In the last issue we focused on Stanford University. This time we turn our attention to Washington University in St. Louis.

Note that the number of student reviewers is small. Consider their personal perspectives as only one component while you gather factual information and impressions from such other sources as college catalogs, site visits, talks with officials and students on campus, and the advice of your guidance counselor and teachers.

Washington University

Washington University, referred to by some as "the Harvard of the Midwest," may not have the name recognition of some of the highly selective East Coast universities; but it offers a first-rate education. Highly able students may be especially interested in the excellent merit-based scholarships offered by each of the schools. For example, the School of Engineering offers four Langsdorf Fellowships (full tuition), twenty Woodward Fellowships (half tuition), and a number of smaller scholarships. Local and minority students are also eligible for special scholarships.

Our reviewers include six students who major(ed) in biology (1), chemical engineering (1), chemistry (1), computer science (1), electrical engineering (1), French (1), math (2), physics (1). (The number of majors exceeds six because several students have double majors.) Students' comments appear in italics.

Quality of Academic Instruction for Undergraduates

Undergraduates enroll in one of five schools—Architecture, Arts & Sciences, Business, Engineering, or Fine Arts—and have the opportunity to take classes in any of the schools. Our reviewers spoke favorably about the overall quality of education at Washington and about the accessibility of professors.

"Washington's most appealing aspect, for me, was its overall academic strength. I looked at many universities and found that in nearly every academic area Washington measured up to other schools, even Ivy League and renowned technical schools. In addition, I have found all my professors to be very approachable. I have also found my classes to be suitably challenging and in-depth."

"Overall, Washington has an excellent undergraduate program. To be sure, it has its share of poor instructors, but in general the faculty are of a high quality. I also found them to be accessible when necessary. Aside from of a handful of introductory courses, most classes have 40 or fewer students, which allows in-class interaction with the professor. Professors, not graduate students, teach the overwhelming majority of classes."

"Distribution requirements are relatively strict: three classes in the natural sciences, three social sciences, three literature/history, and a choice of three from among the many language, art, and philosophy classes offered. Anyone who doesn't mind taking one or two classes per semester in a distant field to broaden his/her knowledge will find Washington to be an excellent school."

"The Engineering School is separate from the Arts & Sciences School and has different distribution requirements. The distribution requirements for the engineering school focus on classes offered in the Engineering School. It is difficult to double major in an engineering and a non-engineering field because almost none of the core requirements overlap, the few who follow this path end up taking at least 18 credit hours a semester."

"The strength of the math department can be seen in its history of strong finishes in the Putnam Mathematical Competition. These results are due to the excellent math faculty, the number of bright students, and weekly practice sessions (held by two enthusiastic math professors) which are fun as well as helpful."

"Washington has about as many graduate as undergraduate students, and a lot of interesting graduate courses are open to promising undergraduates. All of the graduate-level math courses are open to qualified undergraduates. The finals for these classes are the actual qualifying exams for PhD candidates, thereby providing an excellent experience for anyone planning to pursue graduate education in mathematics."

"I've had several excellent professors and only a few bad ones. It's up to you to seek out research opportunities and to go to office hours, etc. Personal attention doesn't come to you, but it only takes a minimum of effort to get it. I've also received a great deal of personal attention through the Honors Scholars Program."

Social Life

Reviewers mentioned the comfortable size of the student body and the lovely campus, located in a suburban area of St. Louis near a large park.

"The size of Washington appealed to me. With 5,000 undergraduates, it was just right for me. I didn't find myself lost in a sea of students, the number of undergraduates was small enough for me to know a reasonable percentage of my fellow students. Furthermore, there are enough students that Washington can support good facilities (e.g., a large library and well-equipped labs) and offer a large selection of classes. Registering for classes and using facilities have also been easy to do."

"The campus is in an attractive, safe area of St. Louis. Dorms are coed and are all in the same part of the campus, both of which help in meeting people. There are many extracurricular activities. Sports are fun but generate little enthusiasm at the intercollegiate level."

"The social life you have at Washington will depend on the amount of energy you put into it. There are certainly plenty of opportunities on campus, plus you have the advantages of being in St. Louis, with its sports teams, museums, night life, and so on."

"You can meet all kinds of people easily. There are also many clubs, like the 'Go' [a chess-like game that is very popular in Japan and China] club, which would be practically impossible to find in a small college."

"There is a considerable Greek system (about 35-40% of students are involved in fraternities and sororities), but most campus parties are open and free. Guys are pressured to join more than girls."

What Do You Like Best About Washington University?

"I've had a very good education almost all free because of my scholarship. I am getting a great research opportunity in a lab at the medical school. Students are friendly, open, helpful, not stuck-up, not too competitive, and intelligent."

"Washington's location is in many ways ideal. While it is in St. Louis, it is not a typical urban campus. It's nestled between two wealthy suburbs and a large park. It doesn't have the high crime rate that some urban campuses have. Yet students still have all the advantages of living in a city; they can easily reach downtown St. Louis by car or bus."

"I was able to set my own agenda for my academic program within the degree restrictions of my major department. I was able to complete a BS/MS program in four years with the help of AP credits, and I managed to pursue some extracurricular activities as well. I also made many friends."

"A bonus, to me, is Washington's beautiful campus. The majority of the buildings on the main campus were built in the late 1800s in the style of Cambridge University in England. Thus, there are many ivy-covered stone buildings, with arches and courtyards and stone benches. Washington's campus is one of the nicest of the many I have seen."

What Do You Like Least About Washington University?

"Many people haven't heard of Washington University. Since deciding to attend, I have explained many times where it is. That's partly because it is a Division III athletic school, where academics take priority over competitive sports. Among people who are familiar with higher education, however, the school is very well respected. The medical school is famous, a feature that draws many pre-meds."

"The rumor that Washington was rated as having the second largest workload of any school in the country had students half-heartedly joking this year. I'm no expert at other schools, but Washington does have a lot of overworked engineering, pre-med, and architecture students. But I've found the atmosphere friendly and enjoyable."

Who Would Be Most Compatible with the Academic and Social Atmosphere at Washington University?

"I am not sure whether there is an ideal student for Washington. A bright, motivated, and reasonably outgoing person will have no problems. I would highly recommend visiting the campus during the year if you are interested in going there."

WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
St. Louis, MO 63130 • (800) 638-0700

- 4-year private coed university
- Suburban campus on the outskirts of St. Louis.
- Semester system; Study Abroad programs.
- Full-time undergraduate enrollment 1992-93: 2,511 men; 2,303 women.
- Special features: Merit- and need-based scholarships; campus adjacent to Forest Park, the second largest municipal park in the US, which includes a science center, zoo, art museum, golf course, and skating rink.

"Washington is not a party school. Most students spend their week nights studying, although the weekends do get pretty rowdy. The ideal person is someone who goes out and gets involved in various activities when he/she has the time, but also has enough discipline to know when to stay in and study. There really is a wide mix of students."

"Someone who is hard-working and can manage that stress. The work load is much heavier than at some schools; intelligence is not the only factor in academic success—hard work is equally important."

If You Had It To Do Over Again, Would You Go To Washington University?

All six reviewers said yes. Two emphasized that their scholarships were a big part of their happiness with their choice.

"Sure. I had a great time, met many good friends, and got a BS/MS in four years. I was well prepared for graduate school, too, and even won an NSF Graduate Fellowship. What more could one ask for from an undergraduate experience?"

"Originally, Washington was not my first choice; in fact, it was low on my list of eleven schools to which I applied and was accepted. However, that was only because I knew little about it. Through my careful college research—visiting, talking with people (deans, professors, students), and reading much college literature—Washington became my first-choice school. While it is not the best choice for everyone, for me it is academic paradise. It is everything I'd hoped for in a college academically and socially. Furthermore, as a recipient of a full-tuition fellowship, I do not have to worry about money while I am pursuing my undergraduate education."

"This is a question I've pondered a lot. I really love Washington, but part of me would like a school with more school spirit. A lot of friends have asked me how I could have chosen Washington over Harvard, which I did. However, I'm happy with my choice and would do it again."

As you try to find the college or university best suited to you, the views of Washington University presented above may be helpful. Keep in mind that these students might have had similar positive or negative experiences had they attended a different university. At any college, it is important for the individual student to seek out challenging academic experiences and the best professors, and to create a social life that best fits his or her personal style. ■

The students quoted in the College Review Series are expressing their own views, which are not necessarily those of JHU or CTY.

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WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

Part I:
Learning How To Write

Writing well is both an art and a craft, a creative marriage of imagination and discipline. If you want to write well, and you want to see your work in print, take these measured steps toward your goal.

Read voraciously. To become a good writer, you must first be an active reader. Read everything you can put your hands on—certainly the Great Books, and others that regularly appear on reading lists, both fiction and non-fiction. Read the better newspapers and magazines to stay informed about world events and expand your experience of life.

As you read, listen for each writer's *voice*, the distinctive tone of the piece. What's the point, and how does the writer develop it? Notice the underlying structure: the framework of beginning, middle, and end. Is the writer's style readable? Do the words and sentences flow in a varying rhythm that draws you in and carries you along?

Start your own reference library. Essential tools of the writing trade include an excellent dictionary such as the latest edition from American Heritage, a thesaurus, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, and the pocket-sized *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White.

Natalie Goldberg's *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* provides helpful hints on journal writing. Claire Kehrwald Cook's *Line by Line: How to Improve Your Own Writing* (published by the Modern Language Association) includes a thorough review of English grammar and punctuation, plus a glossary of often misused words and phrases.

Keep a journal and make writing a daily habit. The discipline of writing, like any other exercise, requires regular practice if you expect to improve. Buy yourself an inexpensive notebook; a steno pad is handy because it's easy to carry and easy to use in crowded cafeterias or on buses. Reserve a time and a place each day to write a page or two in your journal. Take your pad when you leave the house in case inspiration strikes, and leave it by your bed at night to record those flashes of insight that come just before sleep.

Indulge in stream-of-consciousness rambles. Write about your day, your plans for the future, your reactions to people or world events or books you're reading. Try describing a dream you've had—a real challenge because dream imagery is so layered and elusive. Jot down possible themes for short stories, snippets of conversation overheard, new words with their definitions, and *mellifluous* (smooth, sweet, honeyed) phrases. From time to time, you'll refer back to these notebooks for writing ideas.

Don't censor your journal writing; just let your creative self go wild. Remember, you don't have to show this to anyone else. If no specific subject comes to mind, try this trick: just put your penpoint down to the paper, loosen up, and move your hand around until letters form. It sounds silly, but no one's watching you—and it works.

Develop your own writing voice. The more you write, the more clearly you'll hear your own distinctive voice. And the more readily you'll learn to adapt it to different purposes. So experiment with different styles of expression in your journal writing. Then, when you find one that is both effective and comfortable for you, transfer that style to formal writing meant for the eyes of others.

Before you begin a piece, define what you want to say. If you're not clear about your purpose, you may meander your way to the end only to discover that you've arrived at a place you don't recognize. And if *you're* lost, imagine the plight of your poor reader.

English has the largest vocabulary of any language in the world; revel in its richness and put its variety to work for you. This is not an invitation to litter the page with six-syllable words and interminable sentences when shorter ones will do. Overwriting sounds confused, not brilliant. In fact, the most effective writers select language that is most readily understood. Their goal, like yours, is to communicate a point with clarity as well as style.

Vigorously edit your own work. Accept as a given that *no one's* first draft is ever perfect. Professional writers may redraft and revise one piece thirty times—or more. And even then, it runs the gantlet of the publisher's editors before appearing in print. (Be sure to read Steven Shepard's article, which follows, about his experience of the edit-to-publish process.)

To edit effectively, you must harden your heart and slash your way down the page. Identify essentials; eliminate clutter. Unless you have a stylistic reason for using them, avoid the passive voice, *to be* verbs, word repetitions, too many prepositions or relative clauses. Make sure that each word, especially each verb, pulls its full weight.

Once you've written the third (or so) draft, put it away for a few days, then review it with fresh eyes. Read it aloud, and listen to the cadence of syllables, words, and sentences. Is the rhythm too repetitive? Too choppy? Remember that most of us silently *hear* the words on the page; revise until the sound pattern pleases your ear.

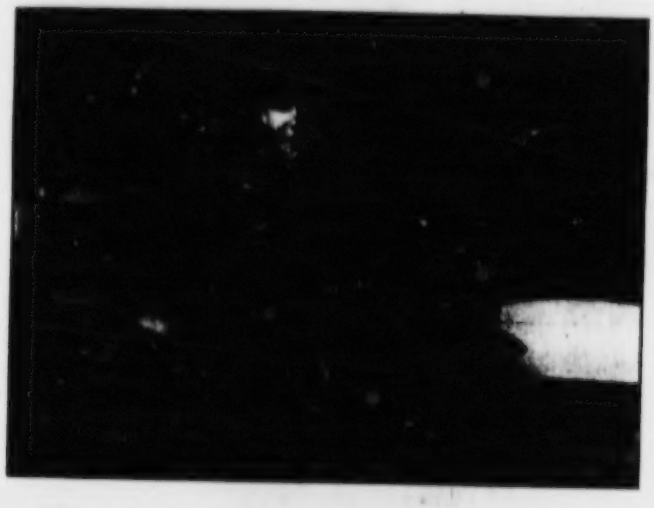
Form a peer review group. Start one with other students at school or with friends outside who share your interest in writing. Set ground rules for constructive criticism, then take turns reading aloud and discussing your work.

You won't enjoy hearing your priceless prose dissected, but if you really listen to an appropriate review, you will become a better writer. You'll learn to choose just the right word and eliminate excess verbiage, to pare down and tighten up.

The fantasy that a *real* writer can toss off a prize winner during a sunlit afternoon on the beach is just that—a fantasy. Writing well is hard work, but you'll appreciate the results. ■

How I Learned to Write, Edit, Re-Edit . . . and Survived

by Steven Shepard



On October 6, 1992, at 5:32 pm, I received a phone call informing me that my book, ***Fogbound***, had won the National Written and Illustrated By . . . Awards Contest for Students. I was ecstatic. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. This was the glorious culmination of months of anxious waiting for the judges' decision. Floating on a cloud of exultation, I was very aware that, after my all-expenses-paid trip to Kansas City to meet with my editors, *Fogbound* would soon become a published book, and I would receive royalties in addition to a $5,000 scholarship.

What I didn't realize was what those Kansas City editors had in mind for me during the next few months. I'd thought, rather naively, that I had already done everything and that all Landmark Editions planned to do was slap me on the back and make lots of copies of my book. Actually, *Fogbound* had just started down the road to publication. Landmark Editions wanted a complete rewrite, including a revamped plot, a new villain, and even a new theme. Not only that, my drawing skills needed to be improved by lengthy practice. Landmark Editions had produced over twenty-five stunning books thus far, and *Fogbound* had to measure up to their standard.

Gulp. It was mid-November when I returned from Kansas City, and I knew even then that I had nearly half a year's work in front of me. I rewrote *Fogbound* from the bottom up, rarely glancing at my original contest entry. I watched as a light, mild story starring a boy trying to row back from a picnic through thick fog became an action-packed thriller about a boy who, attempting to return his father's stolen knife, was chased into thick fog by a sinister lobsterman and forced to battle the elements in a race to return home before his father discovered the blade missing. I felt a tinge of regret at some of the changes. *Fogbound* was no longer the relaxed story I had liked so much; it was evolving into something new.

The first rewritten version wasn't nearly good enough, of course—first drafts never are. It was much rougher than my original story. So work continued at a steady pace, five drafts written in the following three months. This taught me an important writer's credo: *It's never right.* I'd revised my contest entry, of course, but not as I had to revise the new version. The editors forced me to scrutinize every paragraph, asking myself hard questions. Did it waste any words? Did it contain any awkward phrasing? Were there any sentences too difficult for a young child? Was the paragraph, in fact, necessary to the story at all? This was the first time anyone had pored over my work so thoroughly, and I resented some of my publishers' inquiries into what I felt were the best parts of *Fogbound*.

In fact, Landmark Editions and I frequently disagreed; rare is an author-editor team that does not. Our fiercest battle waged around whether or not my main character, Jason, should reveal his illicit adventures to his parents. He'd sinned plenty—gone rowing without permission, taken his sister with him, lost his compass, and worst of all, stolen his father's precious knife and *forgotten* it on an island. Yet with luck and skill, he had seen through it all, covered his tracks, and escaped detection. At least, that's how I wrote it. Landmark Editions, mindful that it was publishing a book for impressionable young minds, reasoned that Jason, being a good kid, should confess his crimes to his parents. Though I disagreed, maintaining that Jason would never do such a thing, my publishers were adamant. Finally I swallowed my pride and my arguments and changed the ending. They were the publishers, after all.

Landmark Editions didn't dictate everything, though. ***Fogbound***, now finished and recently published, is still my story. In fact, it's a better, smoother, more suspenseful book than the one I had written by myself. Most of my concepts remain, and the ones that were edited out have been replaced by better ideas. Everyone involved is pleased with the final product.

I learned a lot from my editors, albeit the hard way, about suspense and successful plot techniques. Before Landmark Editions pointed it out, I'd never realized just how slow my beginning was and what a turnoff this would be to critical elementary school readers. Sending Jason rowing out on a mission to right his misdeed before his parents discovered it, instead of rowing out to enjoy a rather dull picnic, was a great idea. And thanks to Landmark Editions, my artistic skills have improved immensely.

Someone once asked me, "If you had known beforehand about all the months of hard work and the drastic changes that would be made to your story, would you have entered the contest anyway?"

"Definitely," I replied without hesitation. But it was not the scholarship, royalties, or recognition I have gained that made me answer that way. It was something else, something I think every writer will understand. I'd do it all over again just for the satisfaction of having written and illustrated a book.

I hope all the authors, published or not, who read this will take the time to show the world what they can accomplish. There are books in local libraries full of contests and magazines eager to read students' material. But it's up to each individual student to find the time and courage necessary to send stories out to publishers. Take it from me, though—it's worth it. ■

For the past eleven years, Steven Shepard and his family have spent their summers in a secluded area of the Maine coastline, which provided the setting for Fogbound. ***Attending ninth grade in Virginia, Steven also participates in essay, history, science, and piano competitions.***

To order *Fogbound* or any other Landmark Editions publication, call (800) 653-BOOK.

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BOOK REVIEW *by Shruti Ravikumar*

Twelve-year-old Shruti Ravikumar attends 8th grade at The Lawrenceville School in New Jersey. While living in Connecticut last year, she won a gold medal in the COLT Foreign Language Poetry Recitation Contest and was one of three contestants representing her state in the Scripps-Howard Spelling Bee Nationals.

Edith Wharton's *Age of Innocence* takes place in New York City in the 1870s, during an era of gaslit streets and private broughams, an era when scandal was the greatest form of pestilence, and 'taste' and 'form' were presiding idols. It was a time when high society was paramount and acquaintances with opera houses were intimate, an era in which balls were grandiloquent statements to which only the influential were invited. It was an age when the rules of society were rigid, and the citizens of consequence resided behind formidable brownstone facades, under an air of naiveté. In short, it was an age of innocence—assumed innocence.

In this setting Newland Archer is blissfully anticipating his marriage to the gentle and 'suitable' May Welland, when the bohemian Madame Ellen Olenska unexpectedly returns from Europe and changes everything. Archer believes himself to be free from the influence of society. However, his acquaintance with Mme. Olenska, an American married to a European count, shows him that he is indeed tied by the bonds of society. Mme. Olenska, because of her foreign manners and responses (which Archer finds refreshing), is a model of non-conformity. Having returned to New York to run away from her husband, she asks Archer to "explain things" to her. He responds, "It's you who are telling me: opening my eyes to things I'd looked at so long that I'd ceased to see them."

Archer soon falls in love with Mme. Olenska and must finally choose between his heart's desires and his concern for propriety, between his wishes and his obligations. Mme. Olenska acknowledges the presence of the tightly knit rules of society about her and realizes the unsuitability of their match. She therefore does not let Archer get as close to her as he desires. Archer's wife, May, suspects that Archer loves Mme. Olenska, but her thoughts are concealed behind that veil of innocence that envelops the entire society. The complexity of the relationship between Archer and the vibrant Mme. Olenska develops throughout the book, as they live within the small world of New York's social élite, yet are held apart and finally divided by the wall of morality and society's expectations.

One of my favorite scenes is the description of Archer's innermost feelings as he realizes that it is his own unwillingness to defy social convention that has made their match impossible: "He had built within himself a kind of sanctuary in which [Ellen] throned among his secret thoughts and longings. . . . Outside it, in the scene of his actual life, he moved with a growing sense of unreality and insufficiency, blundering against familiar prejudices and traditional points of view as an absent-minded man goes on bumping into the furniture of his own room." The poignancy of this beautiful passage reveals the author's wonderful insight into human nature.

In its portrayal of a different era, *The Age of Innocence* illustrates the profound influence of society upon its inhabitants and demonstrates how the intricate bonds of society could entangle and ensnare any unsuspecting person. It portrays the complexity of human nature and the importance of rank and relations in that age of innocence—an age when everyone "knew more about each other's private thoughts than we ever have time to find out about our own."

This Pulitzer Prize-winning classic is elegant, vibrant, and eloquent. The intimate access Wharton gives her readers to the innermost thoughts and feelings of her characters, along with her vivid descriptions, brings the book to life. This striking portrayal of love betrayed is a masterpiece, and I recommend it highly.

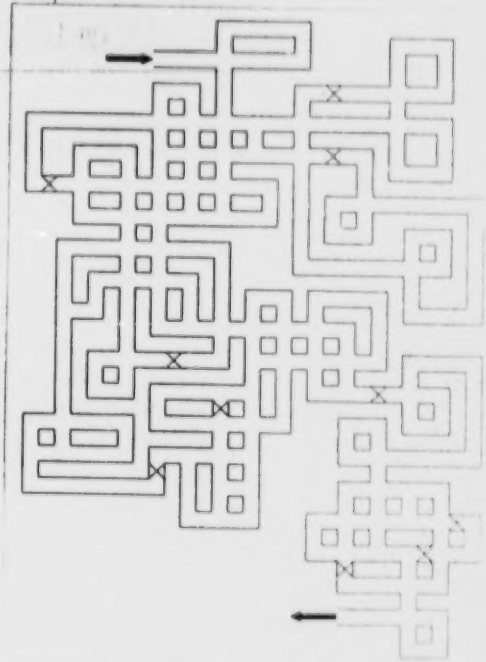
ANOTHER PUZZLE

by Tim Boester

Fascinated by mazes and puzzles, **Tim Boester** is also intrigued by roller coaster design. Tim has just turned seventeen and plans to study physics and math when he enters college next fall.

DIRECTIONS:

1. You must go through all the Xs.
2. When you reach an intersection, you may go straight through or make a turn to the right or left. However, once you turn, you can turn only in that direction until you pass through an X. (So you have to plan ahead; don't put yourself into a left-turn-only corner if you are in a right-turn-only mode.)
3. Switch the direction you are turning every time you pass through an X.
4. You may cross your path, but may not repeat or backtrack.



Answers to Puzzles in Sept./Oct. issue of *Imagine*